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**TESTIMONY OF
LUCILLE BENTLEY, RN
DIRECTOR OF THE FAMILY HEALTH CENTER
ST. VINCENT'S MEDICAL CENTER
SUBMITTED TO THE
FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE
TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2015**

HB 7058, An Act Concerning The Hospital Tax

My name is Lucille Bentley. I am a registered nurse and have served as Director of the Family Health Center at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport for five years.

Let me begin by stating on behalf of my colleagues at St. Vincent's and the thousands of families we serve that St. Vincent's Medical Center strongly supports HB 7058, An Act Concerning the Hospital Tax, which will phase out the hospital tax.

For more than 112 years, St. Vincent's has served the Greater Bridgeport community. We are the largest employer in the City of Bridgeport and we employ more than 3,500 associates, including our medical staff. We are a safety net hospital, and last year, delivered more than \$40 million in community benefit in the form of charity care and discounted care. The hospital tax has and will continue to further damage our ability to serve our most vulnerable and needy - the very reason we were founded in 1903.

Two years ago, the Governor's budget was passed with more than \$550 million in hospital reimbursement reductions, including the hospital tax. For St. Vincent's, that budget resulted in cuts of more than \$30 million over two years, forcing us to make difficult decisions about how we care for those who need us. It resulted in our first lay off in over 15 years and the loss of 100 full time jobs in our community. Our dedicated associates went without pay raises and gave back days of Paid Time Off in order to help close our budget gap. We paid more for medical benefits. We closed a school on our Behavioral Health campus that served at risk, troubled youth.

When we talk about health care dollars, though, we're really talking about people, and I'd like to tell you a little about the people we see at our Center.

We take care of patients of all ages - children, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens - who are either underinsured or uninsured. Some are undocumented. About 50% are on Medicaid, about 20% are on Medicare, and the rest are primarily



charity care. We give out a significant amount of charity care, and the Family Health Center budget of \$5 million is funded entirely by the Medical Center. It does not fund itself, as most of the care is either reimbursed at a much lower rate than it costs, or not at all.

We treat more than 20,000 individuals each year. For most of the patients we see, we are their primary healthcare providers. Our patients are so thankful that the Family Health Center is here for them. They depend on us to treat their illnesses and to help keep them healthy. Members of the Family Health Center staff and other caregivers at St. Vincent's also go out into the community to teach people about the importance of prevention and early detection. That's the future of healthcare, and most important for those we serve. How will we continue to provide outreach if our budget continues to be cut and reimbursements decrease each year?

In addition to our primary care services, an essential part of the care we provide at The Family Health Center is the access to specialty clinics that our families depend on. Specialists in cardiology, orthopedics, gastrointestinal medicine, endocrinology, rheumatology and more come to our clinic each month to provide specialty care for our patients. I am concerned that ongoing fiscal constraints are putting these specialty services – and perhaps our entire clinic – in jeopardy.

The Family Health Center does not make any money for the hospital. We offer the Center because it is needed and a critical component of our mission to serve the poor and vulnerable – again - the very reason that St. Vincent's was founded in 1903.

If hospitals had to cut back on services such as ours due to government underfunding or the hospital tax, it would have a devastating impact on the neediest patients in our communities. I fear these patients would wait until they were very ill and then need to seek care through our emergency departments instead, which would be much more costly in terms of the financial impact as well as on our patients' health.

Our patients are so grateful to us for the care we provide. We, as caregivers, would be equally grateful to you in return, for your support of our hospitals. Our patients, many of whom cannot advocate for themselves, are relying on you to protect hospital funding. We need a sustainable healthcare environment in our state, not more cuts and taxes. Our associates at St. Vincent's Medical Center urge you to vote "Yes" and support the elimination of the hospital tax.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.